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THE SPIRIT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

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BY

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The Executive Committee of the Association for International Conciliation wish to arouse the interest of the American people in the progress of the movement for promoting international peace and relations of comity and good fellowship between nations. To this end they print and circulate documents giving information as to the progress of these movements, in order that individual citizens, the newspaper press, and organizations of various kinds may have readily available accurate information on these subjects. A list of publications will be found on page 15.

THE SPIRIT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

MR. PRESIDENT, GENTLEMEN OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK.—I thank you with entire sincerity and much feeling for your reception, and for the kind expressions which old friendship and the association of a lifetime have made it possible for your President to utter. However old I may come to be, I shall never pass out from under the impression of reverence for the men who forty to fifty years ago made the Chamber of Commerce; and first among them in my memory stands the noble and inspiring presence of the father of your present President.

I thought of those men when some dozen years ago, a great excitement had carried a large number of people to the barren and uninhabited land on the shores of the Behring Straits. Fifteen thousand men found themselves there without government, without law, and without organization. In characteristic American fashion they proceeded to organize a Chamber of Commerce of Nome. And they called upon the War Department to send them some officers and men to enable them to ex-

ecute the decrees of the Chamber of Commerce for the benefit of the people on that shore. The call was responded to after the fashion in which the American army is all the time doing odd jobs for the promotion of peace and order; and the Chamber of Commerce speedily grew into an organized government.

The Chamber of Commerce of New York has been rendering very much the same kind of service during all these one hundred and forty-four years. It has been giving impetus and form to public sentiment, the effects of which have been put in operation through the ordinary channels of governmental institutions. The institutions themselves are empty forces but for the sentiment behind them; and the sentiment behind them is furnished by such men as I see before me here and by such institutions as this Chamber of Commerce. The real government of the country rests with such institutions and the men who compose their membership.

My friends, the noise and excitement of a great presidential campaign is over; the stress and strain, the over-statements, the warping of judgment by personal considerations and by old associations, have passed into memory, and we are all at rest; and during this period of rest, which in this active

and vigorous and progressive country must be but short, it seems to be a good time for national introspection.

I have been thinking whether passing beyond and behind all the issues that we have been discussing, we can answer in the affirmative or the negative a crucial question, underlying them all, and that is this: Are we advancing in our capacity for self-government? Are we maintaining our capacity for self-government?

All the rest is unimportant compared with that. If we have the spirit of a true self-governing people, whichever way we decide the questions of the moment, we come through right. Whatever we do about the tariff or about the trusts, or about the railroads, or about wages, or about corporations, or whatever we do about any of the issues before the American people, if we have at heart the true spirit of a free self-governing democracy we come through right. What is it? What is the spirit of a free self-governing democracy? What are its essentials, and have we them to a greater or a less degree? What is the tendency, is it up or down?

Of course, a people to be self-governing must have independence of character and courage; that we know we have. Throughout the length and breadth

of our land the Americans have an attitude in which one recognizes no social or political superior, in which every man knows himself to be a man of equal manhood with all others and has the courage to speak his opinions and to maintain them; and we thank God for that.

But that is not enough; that is not all. All histories of wild and savage people, all the histories of lawless and undisciplined men, all the histories of civil wars and revolutions, all the histories of discord and strife which checks the onward march of civilization and holds a people stationary until they go down instead of going up, admonish us that it is not enough to be independent and courageous.

Self-governing people must have the spirit which makes them self-controlled, which makes every man competent and willing to govern his impulses by the rule of declared principle. And more than that, men in a self-governed democracy must have a love of liberty that means not merely one's own liberty but others' liberty. We must respect the opinions and the liberty of the opinions of our countrymen. That spirit excludes hatred of our opponents. That spirit excludes a desire to abuse, to villify, to destroy. All of us in foreign lands have felt the blood rush to the head, and felt the heart beat

quicker, felt a suffusion of feeling upon seeing our country's flag floating in strange ports and in distant cities. That, my friends, is but a false sentiment, unless it carries with it a love not only for the flag but for the countrymen under the flag. True love of country is not an abstraction. It means a little different feeling toward every American because he is American. It means a desire that every American shall be prosperous; it means kindly consideration for his opinions, for his views, for his interests, for his prejudices, and charity for his follies and his errors. The man who loves his country only that he may be free does not love his country. He loves only himself and his own way and that is not self-government, but is the essence of despotism.

Now as to that feeling I will not say that we have gone backward, but I will say, that there is serious cause for reflection on the part of all Americans.

Our life has become so complicated, the activities of our country so numerous and so vast, that it is very difficult for us to understand what our countrymen are doing. The cotton planters understand each other, the wheat farmers understand each other, the importers understand each other, the bankers understand each other, but there are vast masses of the people of our country who totally misunder-

stand others of our people, and that misunderstanding lies at the bottom of the spirit which I have attempted to describe as so necessary to real self-government.

The misunderstanding, and when I say the misunderstanding it implies erroneous ideas, for there are hundreds of thousands of people, outside the great industrial communities, who think you are a den of thieves, and there are hundreds of thousands of people who think that the manufacturers of the country are no better than a set of confidence men. Why, we have before us now great and serious questions regarding the financial problems of the country, and this is what stands in the way of their solution: It is that the men who understand the finances of the country, the bankers, and the merchants engaged in great operations, are under suspicion. Great bodies of people will not accept what they say regarding the subject of finance, a subject complicated by all the currents and movements of finance throughout the world; they will not accept what the experts say, what the men who understand the subject say, because they do not believe their motives are honest. So that the only one who can be heard is the man who does not understand the subject. How are we to reach any conclusion in that

way? On the other hand, there are many in this room to-night who way down in their hearts believe that the great bodies of the American people really want to destroy their business and confiscate their property, that they are enemies to the men who are carrying on the vast business essential to our prosperity.

Now, neither is true. One misunderstanding leads to conduct which in some respect seems to justify another misunderstanding. Nobody in this country wants to destroy business, wants to destroy prosperity. I say nobody. Of course, there are always hangers-on in every country who would like to destroy everything in the hope of picking up the pieces. But speaking of the great body of the people, they do not want to destroy prosperity; and when they do things, when they vote for measures, when they elect Representatives, leading you to think that they want to destroy prosperity, it is because they misunderstand you, and you misunderstand them.

There is nothing more important to-day, than that, by education and the spread of ideas, such misunderstanding shall be disposed and done away with, and that all Americans shall come to the spirit of popular government in which every American de-

sires the prosperity and the happiness of every other American; every American naturally feels a trust in all Americans, because they are all his brothers, fellow inheritors of the great system of constitutional law for the preservation of liberty and justice, of the same great traditions, the same noble ideals of human freedom and human opportunity.

There is one other essential to the spirit of self-government, and that is justice. The manufacturer, the employer of labor, who is unwilling to be just to his workingmen is false to the ideals of his country. The laborer who, in the comparatively new-found power of organization, is unjust to his employer is false to those great traditions in which rest the liberty of all labor.

The willingness to do justice in a nation to every brother of our common land is the ideal of self-government. Further than that, the willingness to do justice as a nation is the true conception of self-government. That rude and bumptious willingness to insult and deride, the result of ignorance, is wholly false to the true dignity and the true spirit of popular self-government.

We are now approaching a question which will test the willingness of the American people to be true to the ideals of self-government and show

that a democracy can be honorable and just. Sixty odd years ago Great Britain and the United States were owners of a great territory extending from Mexico to the frozen north, each with a great sea coast on the Atlantic and each with a great sea coast on the Pacific. It was of vital importance to both that the age-long problem of transit across the Isthmus should be solved; and they went into partnership to support and to stand behind the making of a canal across the Isthmus. They embodied their agreement in what was called the CLAYTON-BULWER Treaty of 1850. Well, time passed. Nothing was done, largely, for a long time, because of the French experiment of canal building; until finally a few years ago that partnership was dissolved, and then a new agreement was made under which Great Britain retired from her position, and signed over to the United States all the rights she had under the partnership agreement, with the provision that the canal, when constructed under the patronage of the United States or by the United States, whichever it might be, should be opened and made neutral upon the same terms that were specified in the original agreement, which were that the ships of Great Britain and the ships of the United States should have exactly the same treatment.

Then Panama made to the United States a grant of the use and occupation of a strip of territory across the Isthmus to be used for the construction of a canal in accordance with the terms and stipulations in this treaty with Great Britain. The last session of Congress, however, passed a law which gives free transit to American ships engaged in coastwise trade when passing between our Atlantic coast and our Pacific coast, while tolls are to be imposed upon British ships passing between British ports on the Atlantic and British ports on the Pacific, and upon all other foreign ships. Now, Great Britain claims that that is a violation of the treaty which we made with her and in accordance with which, by express provisions contained in our grant from Panama, we were to build and open the canal. Congress takes a different view of the construction of the treaty, and it has passed this law which Great Britain says violates it. The question is now, "What is to be done about it?"

We have a treaty with Great Britain under which we have agreed that all questions arising upon the interpretation of treaties shall be submitted to arbitration; and, while it seems hardly conceivable, yet there are men who say that we will never arbitrate the question of the construction of that treaty; but

I say to you that if we refuse to arbitrate it, we will be in the position of the merchant who is known to all the world to be false to his promises.

With our nearly four thousand millions of foreign trade we will stand in the world of commerce as a merchant false to his word. Among all the people on this earth who hope for better days of righteousness and peace in the future, we will stand, in the light of our multitude of declarations for arbitration and peace, as discredited, dishonored hypocrites; with the fair name of America blackened, with the self-respect of Americans gone, with the influence of America for advance along the pathway of progress and civilization, annulled, dishonored and disgraced. No true American can fail to use his voice and his influence upon this question for his country's honor.

We need to think about these deeper things, more important than anything we have been discussing in the campaign. For, if we are right fundamentally, we will solve all the questions. The spirit of a people is everything, the decision of a particular question is nothing, if we are honest and honorable. If we are lovers of liberty and justice, if we are willing to do, as a nation, what we feel bound to do as individuals in our communities, then all the

questions we have been discussing will be solved right, and for countless generations to come Americans will still be brothers, as they were in the days of old, leading the world toward happier lives and nobler manhood, toward the realization of the dreams of philosophers and the prophets, for a better and nobler world.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Nos. 1–54, inclusive (April, 1907, to May, 1912). Including papers by Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, George Trumbull Ladd, Elihu Root, Barrett Wendell, Charles E. Jefferson, Seth Low, William James, Andrew Carnegie, Philander C. Knox, Pope Pius X, Heinrich Lammasch, Norman Angell, and others. A list of titles and authors will be sent on application.

Special Bulletin: War Practically Preventable, and Arguments for Universal Peace, by Rev. Michael Clune, June, 1912.

55. The International Mind. Opening Address at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, by Nicholas Murray Butler, June, 1912.

56. The Irrationality of War. On Science as an Element in the Developing of International Good Will and Understanding, by Sir Oliver Lodge, July, 1912.

57. The Interest of the Wage-earner in the Present Status of the Peace Movement; Address Delivered at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, by Charles Patrick Neill, August, 1912.

58. The Relation of Social Theory to Public Policy, by Franklin H. Giddings, September, 1912.

59. The Double Standard in Regard to Fighting, by George M. Stratton, October, 1912.

60. As to Two Battleships. Contributions to the Debate upon the Naval Appropriation Bill in the House of Representatives, November, 1912.

61. The Cosmopolitan Club Movement, by Louis P. Lochner, December, 1912.

62. The Spirit of Self-Government; Address Delivered at the 144th Anniversary Banquet of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, by Elihu Root, January, 1913.

Up to the limit of the editions printed, any one of the above will be sent postpaid upon receipt of a request addressed to the Secretary of the American Association for International Conciliation, Postoffice Sub-station 84, New York, N. Y.

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